# Predictors of Psychological Well-Being Among Students at Islamic University in Uganda

## Abubakar Ndagi Muhammad[1], Musa Matovu[2], and Siraje A. Ssekamanya[3]

[1]Senior Lecturer, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, Islamic University in Uganda

[2]Assoc. Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, Islamic University in Uganda

[3]Assoc. Professor, Department of Educational Psychology and Counselling, Kulliyyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia

## Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between social support, religious commitment, and resilience, and their predictive value for psychological well-being among undergraduate students at the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU), Main Campus. A cross-sectional survey of 345 students was conducted using validated scales: the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, the Religious Commitment Inventory-10, the Brief Resilience Scale, and the Psychological Well-being Scale. Descriptive analyses characterized the sample, and multiple regression tested the independent contributions of each predictor. Results indicated that social support ($\beta$ = .370, $p$ < .001), resilience ($\beta$ = .287, $p$ < .001), and religious commitment ($\beta$ = .176, $p$ < .001) each significantly and uniquely predicted psychological well-being, together accounting for 48.3% of the variance ($R^2$ = .483). The findings underscore the importance of fostering supportive networks, spiritual engagement, and resilience skills to promote student mental health in university settings. It is therefore recommended that various stakeholders in the University such as administrators, counsellors, *Da'awah* Committee (Council of religious affairs), and students' leaders should develop appropriate programmes that provide social support, enhance religious commitment, and cultivate resilience to increase students' ability to cope with the problems of psychological well-being.

## Introduction

University students globally face significant psychological challenges, with academic pressures, social transitions, and personal stressors contributing to diminished well-being (Acharya et al., 2018). At the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU), these challenges are compounded by unique cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors. Students often relocate from diverse regions, navigate rigorous academic demands, and adapt to a faith-based environment, all while managing limited access to mental health resources—a pattern observed across Ugandan institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kaggwa et al., 2021). Understanding the predictors of psychological well-being (PWB) in this context is critical, as mental health disparities persist despite growing

recognition of their impact on academic success and long-term resilience (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020).

Academic stressors, such as high workloads and financial constraints, are well-documented contributors to psychological distress among Ugandan students (Kaggwa et al., 2023). During the pandemic, prolonged lockdowns exacerbated these pressures, with Kaggwa et al. (2021) reporting a 40.2% prevalence of psychological distress and 25.7% depression rates among undergraduates (Kaggwa et al., 2021). At IUIU, similar stressors persist, particularly for students balancing tuition fees, familial expectations, and the transition to remote or hybrid learning models. Satisfaction with academic performance emerges as a protective factor, linked to reduced depression and suicidal ideation (Kaggwa et al., 2023), underscoring the need for institutional support systems tailored to mitigate academic-related stress.

Social support—both peer and familial—plays a pivotal role in buffering mental health challenges. Research in Thailand and Singapore highlights how support from friends and family significantly predicts autonomy, growth, and cognitive well-being (Ng et al., 2021). In Uganda, however, limited access to mental health services and stigma often hinder students from seeking help, with only 18.3% of distressed individuals consulting professionals (Kaggwa et al., 2021). At IUIU, the faith-based community may uniquely enhance social support networks, as religious institutions often serve as informal hubs for emotional and material aid, though this remains understudied in East African Islamic institution context.

Resilience, defined as the capacity to adapt to adversity, is another critical predictor of PWB. The "fourth wave" of resilience research emphasizes multilevel analyses, including gene-environment interactions and adaptive systems (Masten, 2018). Among Ugandan students, resilience correlates with reduced anxiety and depression, particularly when coupled with mindfulness practices (Nalugya-Sserunjogi et al., 2016). For IUIU students, resilience may be cultivated through religious coping mechanisms, such as prayer and community solidarity, though empirical evidence in this area is sparse (Nasir et al., 2022).

Religious commitment, a cornerstone of life at IUIU, may further enhance well-being by fostering purpose and belonging. Studies in Indonesia demonstrate that gratitude and social support mediated by religious practices improve PWB among marginalized groups, including people living with HIV (Nasir et al., 2022). In Islamic contexts, daily rituals (e.g., Salah) and communal activities (e.g., Ramadan) may similarly buffer stress, though cultural nuances—such as stigma around mental health—could limit their efficacy (Rassool, 2015).

The interplay of these factors—academic stress, social support, resilience, and religious commitment—remains underexplored in Ugandan higher education. While cross-cultural studies in refugee populations highlight the role of cultural context in shaping mental health outcomes (Hynie, 2018), few have examined how Islamic values intersect with traditional predictors of PWB. For instance, religious adherence might amplify social support but also heighten stress for students grappling with secular-academic demands (Nasir et al., 2022). In Kampala, adolescents faced heightened loneliness and familial conflicts, with out-of-school youth disproportionately affected (Kaggwa et al., 2021). At IUIU, pandemic-related disruptions likely exacerbated existing inequalities, particularly for students from low-income households or rural areas.

Financial constraints, reported by 49.5% of Ugandan students as a barrier to mental health care (Kaggwa et al., 2021), underscore the need for economic interventions alongside psychosocial support.

In order to curb the psychological well-being challenges, universities must prioritize mental health literacy programs, resilience-building workshops, and faith-aligned counseling services. In Singapore, mindfulness interventions significantly improved well-being (Ng et al., 2021), while Ugandan data advocate for peer support networks and financial aid (Kaggwa et al., 2023). At IUIU, leveraging Islamic principles—such as Zakat (almsgiving) for economic support and communal prayers for emotional solidarity—could create culturally resonant interventions (Nasir et al., 2022). Thus, the psychological well-being of IUIU students is shaped by a complex matrix of academic, social, and religious factors. While global studies identify resilience, social support, and mindfulness as universal predictors, their manifestation in an East African Islamic context demands localized research. By addressing gaps in cultural and faith-based analyses, this study aims to inform tailored strategies that honour both the religious ethos of IUIU and the diverse needs of its student body.

## Purpose of the Study

The present study aims to assess whether perceived social support, religious commitment, and resilience are statistically significant predictors of psychological well-being among undergraduate students at IUIU. Hypotheses of the study were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- **$H_{0a}$:** Social support is not a statistically significant predictor of psychological well-being among IUIU students.
- **$H_{0b}$:** Religious commitment is not a statistically significant predictor of psychological well-being among IUIU students.
- **$H_{0c}$:** Resilience is not a statistically significant predictor of psychological well-being among IUIU students.

## Theoretical Framework and Research Model

This study is grounded in Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which holds that individuals strive to acquire, retain, protect, and recover valued resources—be they material, social, or personal—to mitigate stress and sustain well-being. Within this framework, social support is viewed as a critical external resource, offering emotional, informational, and instrumental aid that buffers students against academic and personal stressors; resilience is conceptualized as an intrapersonal resource, reflecting one's capacity to adaptively rebound from adversity and maintain positive functioning (Masten, 2018); and religious commitment is regarded as a hybrid social-existential resource, providing communal belonging, existential meaning, and structured coping rituals (Rassool, 2015). Accordingly, the research model for this study (Figure 1) posits that higher levels of each of these three resources will exert a direct, positive influence on the psychological well-being of university students.
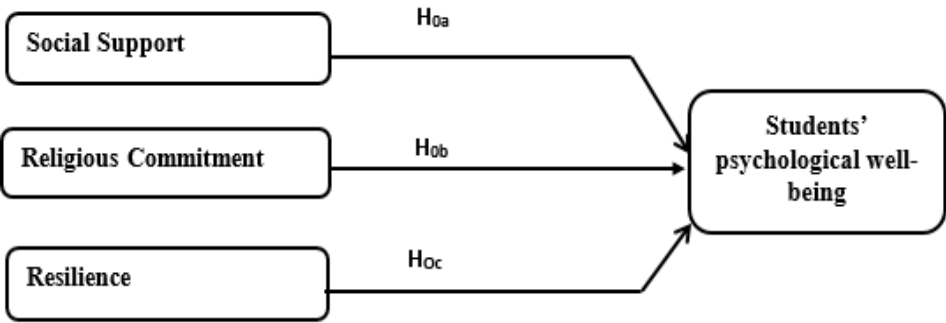
*Figure 1*. Research model linking social support, religious commitment, and resilience to psychological well-being

## Methods

### Research Design

A correlational design was employed to examine the extent to which social support, religious commitment, and resilience predict psychological well-being among students at the Islamic University in Uganda. This design was considered appropriate as the study was aimed at identifying factors associated with psychological well-being among university students at the Islamic University in Uganda, Main Campus (MC) at a specific point in time, without the need to experimentally manipulate variables or track changes longitudinally (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### Participants and Sampling

The target population comprised all registered undergraduate students at IUIU-MC during the 2024–2025 academic year. Using faculty enrolment lists as a sampling frame, a cluster sampling approach was applied to select students from three randomly selected faculties out of seven.  A total of 345 students from the Faculties of Education, Law, and Management Studies (Mean age = 23.4 years, SD = 2.8;) completed the study.

### Measures

***Perceived Social Support***
– Instrument: Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988).
– Description: 12 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Very strongly disagree to 7 = Very strongly agree), assessing support from family, friends, and significant others.
– Reliability: Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .88.

***Religious Commitment***
– Instrument: Religious Commitment Inventory–10 (RCI-10; Worthington et al., 2003).
– Description: 10 items on a 5-point scale (1 = Not at all true of me to 5 = Totally true of me), measuring the degree of personal and communal religious engagement.
– Reliability: Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .81.

***Resilience***
– Instrument: Brief Resilience Scale (BRS; Smith et al., 2008).
– Description: 6 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree), gauging the ability to recover from stress.

– Reliability: Cronbach's α = .79.
All the above instruments were adapted.

### *Psychological Well-Being*

– Instrument: Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scales, Short Form (18-item; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).
– Description: Six subscales (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, self-acceptance), each with 3 items rated on a 6-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 6 = Strongly agree).
– Reliability: Cronbach's α = .85.

### Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected online via KoboCollect during the second semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. An invitation e-mail containing the study information sheet and consent form was sent to selected students; those who consented proceeded to the questionnaire link. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and ethical clearance was obtained from the IUIU Research Ethics Committee.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two stages using SPSS (v.26). First, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) were computed to profile demographic characteristics and core variables. Second, multiple regression was used to test the three null hypotheses:

- $H_{0a}$: Social support does not significantly predict psychological well-being among IUIU students.
- $H_{0b}$: Religious commitment does not significantly predict psychological well-being among IUIU students
- $H_{0c}$: Resilience does not significantly predict psychological well-being among IUIU students.

Predictors were entered simultaneously in a single block. Prior to regression, assumptions of normality (Shapiro–Wilk), linearity, homoscedasticity, and absence of multicollinearity (VIF < 5) were examined and met. Statistical significance was evaluated at α = .05.

## Results

This section presents the results of the data analysis conducted to examine the predictors of psychological well-being among university students in IUIU-MC. The results are presented in two main parts: descriptive statistics and inferential analysis. Descriptive statistics summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while inferential statistics address the hypotheses of the study through multiple regression analysis.

### Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study participants, including age, religious affiliation, and program of study. These demographics provide an overview of the sample composition.

**Table 1**
*Demographic Distribution of Respondents (N=345)*

| Variable | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
| Age bracket | | |
|     22 years and below | 156 | 45.2 |
|     23-27 years | 169 | 49.0 |
|     28-32 years | 13 | 3.8 |
|     33 years and above | 7 | 2.0 |
| Religion | | |
|     Muslim | 158 | 45.8 |
|     Catholic | 63 | 18.3 |
|     Protestant | 79 | 22.9 |
|     Other | 45 | 13.0 |
| Study programme | | |
|     Education | 284 | 82.3 |
|     Management Studies | 11 | 3.2 |
|     Law | 50 | 14.5 |

Table 1 presents the age distribution of the 345 student participants. The majority (49.0%) fall within the age range of 23–27 years, closely followed by those aged 22 years and below (45.2%). A much smaller proportion of respondents are aged 28–32 years (3.8%), and only 2.0% are 33 years and above. This suggests that most participants are in their early adulthood, a period generally associated with higher education pursuits. Similarly, on the religious distribution of participants, Muslims made up the largest share (45.8%), followed by Protestants (22.9%), and the Catholics (18.3%). Adherents of other faiths comprise the smallest group at 13.0%. This diversity in religious affiliation offers an appropriate context for examining how religious commitment might relate to psychological well-being. And lastly the academic programs of the respondents. A majority (82.3%) of participants are in Education-related courses, while 14.5% are Law students. Only a small fraction (3.2%) are pursuing Management Studies. The Faculty of Education has the biggest number of students at Main Campus.

**Regression Analysis**

To test the study's hypotheses, hierarchical multiple regression was employed to assess the predictive power of social support, religious commitment, and resilience on psychological well-being. The results are presented in Tables 2 through 5.

**Table 2**
*Model Summary for Regression Analysis*

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .695[a] | .483 | .479 | .97985 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Resilience, Rel_Commit, Social_Support

Table 2 summarizes the regression model's overall fit. The R-value (.695) indicates a strong positive relationship between the predictors (religious commitment, social support, and resilience) and psychological well-being. The $R^2$ value of .483 implies

that approximately 48.3% of the variance in psychological well-being can be explained by the three predictors, a substantial proportion suggesting a robust model.

**Table 3**
*ANOVA – Significance of the Regression Model*

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 306.367 | 3 | 102.122 | 106.365 | .000[b] |
| | Residual | 327.397 | 341 | .960 | | |
| | Total | 633.764 | 344 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: Wellbeing
b. Predictors: (Constant), Resilience, Rel_Commit, Social_Support

Table 3 displays the ANOVA results testing the overall significance of the regression model. The F-statistic (106.365) is highly significant (p < .001), confirming that the combined predictors (resilience, religious commitment, and social support) reliably predict psychological well-being among the students.

**Table 4**
*Regression Coefficients*

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. |
| 1 | (Constant) | .973 | .220 | | 4.429 | .000 |
| | Religious Commitment | .270 | .075 | .176 | 3.611 | .000 |
| | Social Support | .341 | .047 | .370 | 7.234 | .000 |
| | Resilience | .391 | .064 | .287 | 6.142 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: Wellbeing

Table 4 shows the coefficients for the predictors in the model. All three variables—religious commitment (β = .176, p < .001), social support (β = .370, p < .001), and resilience (β = .287, p < .001)—are statistically significant predictors of psychological well-being. This suggests that increases in these variables are positively associated with increased psychological well-being among students.

**Table 5**
*Summary of Hypothesis Testing*

| Structural Paths | Standardized Coefficients | P | Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|
| Wellbeing ← Social_Support | .370 | .000 | Statistically significant |
| Wellbeing ← Rel_Commit | .176 | .000 | Statistically significant |
| Wellbeing ← Resilience | .287 | .000 | Statistically significant |

Table 5 summarizes the results of hypothesis testing. All structural paths are statistically significant (p < .001), supporting the hypotheses that social support, religious commitment, and resilience positively and significantly predict psychological well-being.

Among them, social support has the strongest predictive effect, followed by resilience and religious commitment.

The study set out to examine the predictive relationship between social support, religious commitment, resilience, and psychological well-being among university students in Eastern Uganda. The regression analysis revealed that all three predictors—social support, religious commitment, and resilience—had statistically significant and positive effects on psychological well-being. These findings align with a growing body of literature emphasizing the importance of psychosocial factors in student mental health.

## Discussion of Findings

Social support emerged as the strongest predictor of psychological well-being ($\beta$ = .370, $p$ < .001). This result underscores the vital role of supportive relationships in buffering against psychological distress. Social support systems—whether from peers, family, or institutions—serve as key protective factors, particularly in stressful academic environments. According to Hynie (2018), supportive social networks significantly influence mental health outcomes, particularly for populations experiencing transition and uncertainty, such as university students. This is further echoed in the work of Sibley et al. (2020), who noted a sharp decline in well-being during the COVID-19 lockdowns among individuals with limited social contact, reinforcing the buffering role of social connectedness. In the Ugandan context, Kaggwa et al. (2021) highlight that lack of social support was frequently cited in media reports on student suicides. The evidence suggests that university environments need to foster both formal and informal support structures to safeguard students' psychological health.

Resilience was also a significant positive predictor ($\beta$ = .287, $p$ < .001), confirming that students who are more resilient tend to experience better psychological well-being. This supports Masten's (2018) resilience theory, which conceptualizes resilience as a dynamic capacity for positive adaptation in the face of adversity. In line with this theory, students who can recover from academic, financial, or social stressors without enduring negative psychological effects demonstrate higher well-being. The present findings are also consistent with Nalugya-Sserunjogi et al. (2016), who identified resilience as a key buffer against depressive symptoms among Ugandan adolescents. Moreover, Kaggwa et al. (2023) found that resilience was a protective factor during the COVID-19 lockdown, mitigating the risk of depression among university students in Uganda. Together, these studies affirm that resilience-building interventions should be an integral part of mental health strategies in academic institutions.

Religious commitment ($\beta$ = .176, $p$ < .001) was also positively associated with well-being, though to a lesser extent than social support and resilience. This relationship is supported by previous research emphasizing the mental health benefits of spiritual and religious involvement. Nasir et al. (2022) noted that religious commitment among Muslim youth enhanced their sense of purpose, moral direction, and emotional regulation, all of which are integral to psychological well-being. Rassool (2015) further emphasized that religious practices and beliefs often provide coping mechanisms that can reduce stress and promote mental stability. For university students, religious affiliation may serve as a source of identity and a moral framework, helping them manage life transitions and existential concerns. This was evident during the COVID-19

pandemic, where religious observance reportedly helped individuals cope with uncertainty and isolation (World Health Organization, 2020). The significance of religious commitment in this study also echoes Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources theory, where spiritual beliefs can be seen as internal resources that individuals draw upon to mitigate stress and enhance psychological functioning.

## Limitations

The results of the study may not accurately be generalized to the entire student population of the Islamic University in Uganda owing to poor representation of students from two faculties (Management Studies and Law). Therefore, predictors identified may reflect Faculty of Education specific stressors rather than university-wide trends. It should however be noted that Faculty of Education has the biggest enrolment at the Main Campus and the students showed more willingness to participate in the study. Follow-up studies will address this shortcoming by using stratified sampling across faculties, years of study, and other diverse characteristics.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the influence of social support, religious commitment, and resilience on the psychological well-being of university students in IUIU. The results demonstrated that all three predictors significantly and positively contribute to students' psychological well-being. Social support emerged as the most potent predictor, followed by resilience and religious commitment. Collectively, these variables explained approximately 48.3% of the variance in psychological well-being, indicating a robust model.

These findings reinforce the critical role of psychosocial factors in shaping mental health outcomes among university students, especially in environments marked by academic pressure, limited resources, and socio-economic challenges. The results are consistent with both local and global literature, suggesting that strengthening social connections, building resilience, and promoting meaningful religious engagement can have substantial benefits for student well-being. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for universities, mental health practitioners, policy makers, and future researchers:

Universities should invest in peer mentorship programs, student counselling services, and inclusive extracurricular activities that promote connectedness.
Resilience-building programs, including life skills training, stress management workshops, and emotional regulation strategies, should be incorporated into student development initiatives.

Given the beneficial role of religious commitment, universities should recognize and support faith-based student organizations.

## References

Acharya, L., Jin, L., & Collins, W. (2018). College life is stressful today – Emerging stressors and depressive symptoms in college students. *Journal of American College Health*, *66*(7), 655–664. https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2018.1451869

Creswell, J.W. & Creswell, J.D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications.

Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. *American Psychologist*, *44*(3), 513–524.

Hynie, M. (2018). The social determinants of refugee mental health in the post-migration context: A critical review. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, *63*(5), 297–303. https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743717746666

Kaggwa, M. M., Arinaitwe, I., Kawuki, J., Nkola, R., Muwanguzi, M., Sserunkuma, J., ... & Atim, L. M. (2021). Suicide among Ugandan university students: Evidence from media reports for 2010–2020. *Behavioral Sciences*, *11*(5), 64. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs11050064

Kaggwa, M. M., Kajjimu, J., Ainamani, H. E., & Bongomin, F. (2023). Depression and associated factors among university students in Uganda during COVID-19 lockdown: A cross-sectional study. *PLOS ONE*, *18*(1), e0281084. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0281084

Masten, A. S. (2018). Resilience theory and research on children and families: Past, present, and promise. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, *10*(1), 12–31. https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12255

Nalugya-Sserunjogi, J., Rukundo, G. Z., Ovuga, E., Kiwuwa, M. S., & Musisi, S. (2016). Prevalence and factors associated with depression symptoms among school-going adolescents in Central Uganda. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, *10*, 39. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-016-0133-4

Nasir, R., Muhamad, M. S., & Farid, N. D. N. (2022). Religious commitment and psychological well-being among Muslim youth: A review. *Malaysian Journal of Medical and Health Sciences*, *18*(1), 219–226.

Ng, S. M., Yau, T. K., & Chan, C. L. (2021). An evaluation of the effectiveness of a mindfulness-based psychoeducation group program for people with psychological distress in Singapore. *Asia-Pacific Psychiatry*, *13*(3), e12440. https://doi.org/10.1111/appy.12440

Rassool, G. H. (2015). Cultural competence in counseling the Muslim patient: Implications for mental health. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, *29*(5), 321–325. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnu.2015.06.011

Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*(4), 719–727. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.4.719

Sibley, C. G., Greaves, L. M., Satherley, N., Wilson, M. S., Overall, N. C., Lee, C. H. J., ... & Barlow, F. K. (2020). Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown on trust, attitudes toward government, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, *75*(5), 618–630. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000662

Smith, B. W., Dalen, J., Wiggins, K., Tooley, E., Christopher, P., & Bernard, J. (2008). The Brief Resilience Scale: Assessing the ability to bounce back. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 15*(3), 194–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/10705500802222972

World Health Organization. (2020). *Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak*. https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronavirus/mental-health-considerations.pdf

Worthington, E. L., Jr., Wade, N. G., Hight, T. L., Ripley, J. S., McCullough, M. E., Berry, J. W., & O'Connor, L. (2003). The Religious Commitment Inventory–10: Development, refinement, and validation of a brief scale for research and counseling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 50*(1), 84–96. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.50.1.84

Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., & Farley, G. K. (1988). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 52*(1), 30–41. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa5201_2